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TAGS: [PTER PREL YM COUNTER TERRORISM](#)

SUBJECT: ONGOING AGGRESSIVE CT OPS IN ABYAN

REF: A. SANAA 507

[1](#)B. SANAA 506

Classified By: Ambassador Edmund J. Hull for Reasons 1.5 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Summary/Comment: Yemeni counterterrorism (CT) operations by Central Security Forces (CSF) and Ministry of Defense forces have been ongoing in the Abyan region for approximately one week. ROYG informed Post of the capture of al-Qaida element Raouf Naseeb on 3/3. Minister of Interior and Yemen Special Operations Forces (YSOF) Commander noted 3/8 the capture of persons related to the USS Cole escapees from Aden prison, claiming four captured with six at large. Although questions remain on the exact nature of operations and what type of terrorists are being targeted (e.g., Cole-related or generally al-Qaida), these operations demonstrate an aggressive CT campaign by the ROYG. End Summary/Comment.

[1](#)2. (S/NF) Senior Advisor to the President Mohamed Sudam informed DCM 3/3 that a CT operation had been underway in Abyan for several days. Sudam noted the capture of Ali Abd al-Raouf al-Naseeb, aka Abu Mahjan, whom Sudam described as a companion of Abu Ali al-Harithi and a significant capture affiliated with al-Qaida.

[1](#)3. (S/NF) Minister of Defense Abdullah Ali Aliwa told CJTF-HOA BGEN Robeson and Ambassador 3/8 that the ROYG received information on terrorists hiding in Abyan. Operations were begun with Ministry of Interior forces and a military brigade. He said that some persons were captured but some were still at large.

[1](#)4. (S/NF) Minister of Interior Dr. Rashad Mohamed al-Alimi told BGEN Robeson (visiting from CJTF-HOA) and Ambassador 3/8 that the ROYG received information about persons preparing for terrorist attacks and wanted individuals hiding in the Lawdor area in Abyan. Alimi said they sent a Central Security Forces (CSF) CT unit to carry out operations for capture. He noted that the CSF unit also had a military brigade in support of CSF. He said he expected operations to be complete within 48 hours. When asked about USS Cole escapees, he said that four persons were apprehended, with six still at large. When asked about the Cole escapees Jamal Mohammad al-Badawi and Fahd Mohammed Almed al-Quso, Alimi said that they were still at large. BG Robeson asked whether operations could be observed to assist in ongoing U.S. training of the CSF. Alimi said that videotapes could be made available.

[1](#)5. (S/NF) Yemen Special Operations Forces (YSOF) Commander Ahmed Ali Saleh, who appeared healthy and well after well-publicized assassination attempt rumors (ref A), said that an armored brigade assisted the CSF in the operation. He also told BGEN Robeson 3/8 that YSOF would have only gotten involved if the CSF were unable to handle the operation or if the situation "got out of control." When asked, he said that the operation was against "10 Cole escapees," with four captured and six still at large.

[1](#)6. (C) Ministry of Interior Chief of Staff BGEN Sunidar told RSO 3/8 that the Abyan operations were a result of "ongoing, long-term planning" that began in June 2003 after the assault on the military convoy in Abyan. He said the operation was ongoing and "would take time to sort out and comment on."

[1](#)7. (S/NF) Comment: While many aspects of the ongoing Abyan operation remain unclear, it is positive to see the ROYG mounting an aggressive CT deployment involving coordination among military and MOI assets (including a U.S.-equipped force). The apprehension of Naseeb is a notable success. Possible apprehension of/engagement with escaped Cole suspects remains vague. The paucity of details provided by the ROYG has complicated the task of assessing extensive regional media reporting on Abyan, e.g., reports of hundreds of extremists "surrounded" given a surrender ultimatum. Post will continue to seek details and to press the ROYG for more information before and during future CT operations. End Comment.

HULL